

Excerpt from the poetry manuscript In Memory by Emerald GoingSnake

There Is Not Always Beauty in a Place That Is Beautiful

Like the dim streetlight that will not reveal
your face. The woods behind your house. Decrepit
nature. Decrepit bones. Like this rusted latch—unopened.
A dam not yet responsible. The stone overturning, the pincers
despite—or because. My claw-marked skin. Because *it's only a few
more days 'til payday and it's always only a few more days 'til payday.*
How there is always a waiting. A wanting. Because of metal,
how it is only snug in metal. This reckoning.
This violence. Violence,
and her sentence.

Grandmother Poem [talutsa]

the first inheritance not a puncture wound
 but a chip off the body a hole unclosed

in memory someone else's not mine she stands
 against the doorframe her hands skim unfinished
 wood till it splinters in her skin I can see
 the runner covering hallway tile can pretend
 the mirror hung on her bedroom wall reflects
 something other than silence

it's July when she tells me: *avoid the cicadas hollow*
against the bark their shells fracture beneath my fingers

my grandmother was at once indifferent perhaps
 at times violent but not forgetful I show her
 a picture of me as a child she tells me she's
 always liked her coffee black I cannot imagine her
 as a little girl just as she cannot picture
 me when I am not near her

slowly the gravel piles dwindle I learn to no longer
 search for the house when driving past her old street

she once kept her ingredients in the empty space beside her
 sink a woven throw thumbtacked to keep the ants from eating
 her flour sometimes I would crawl into the makeshift
 cupboard & unwrap the paper bag use my hand as sifter
 leave with white smeared against my cheek
 I didn't know how to use a broom then

only knew cherry stem plucked from
 the fruit cherry pith stuck in my teeth

*First line from Sarah Ghazal Ali's "Matrilineage [umbilicus]"

Brick House

As when a long forgetfulness lifts suddenly & what
we remember is the same as what we do not. The potted
pink daisies on the windowsill no longer grow—only maintain—
& I am taught to do the same. There is a pomegranate, its juice
splattered against brick, & I realize I cannot picture it, nor can I picture
the flowers, cannot recall if they were actually white, or perhaps
entirely different altogether—such as succulents we never watered,
or a plant that wasn't meant to sprout—so I paint until I remember
its/their color. I grew up in a brick house—umber, rust, burnt sienna,
the color of the earth—& yet I cannot see the cracks that appeared
on the west side when I was ten years old. I only see
the trees we didn't grow. The windchimes that
never existed. I wish there were ivy—
 but there is only rust.

*First line from Carl Phillips's "Porcelain"

Memory Ghazal

She tells me of the pink wash bin, the one he held in his hands in the waiting room. The forehead sweat, the white lights, the shaking palms. All that waiting.

And back then, I would feed the rose bush—the watering can, green, shaped like a flower, splashes water against my toes. I can hear Papa’s call and imagine wading

in the creek next to the green house in Gore. Remember those dishes in the sink—will they ever get washed? Dust is piling on the peeling siding, calm in its waiting.

Home is greener in the summers. It’s been years since anyone was here. The bike is still in the garage, the helmet on the worktable. Look, your mom is there, waving.

When the rain is falling, I find a different face in every drop. When will I swallow it all? It sticks, dry in my Emerald throat. All that remembering. All that waiting.

Two Rabbits

& already we are bending like deer at water left to drink
alone: your breath is ambered, fallible—tongues mend
thirst, mend collarbones jagged: a body condemned,
refusing to heal: in leavening watch, our invisible tracks
flood as hair falls down your back & there is nothing
I could ever want again: tonight, soft, forces my repent-
ance: rotten hand after rotten hand after—I am let
in despite my failure, despite turns from sacrality:

there is nothing quite as fragile as blood-born silk,
as breath frozen over by newfound spring: touched
by water this thin—we swallow aching with time: faulty
limbs turned pale light, rawbones like discarded film
this—over—fur—suture—: my own ribs dried, crushed,
beneath this less violent night & the animals of our bodies:

Low's Pitcher-Plant

There is not a day goes by that I do not think of my own
taming, much like the *Nepenthes lowii* atop Borneo mountains

that refrain from small frogs and spiders for the droppings
of tree shrews. How corrosive nectar becomes nourishment,

how waste matter becomes survival.

I wonder—always—why, but know there is no answer for the
move away from carnivory, nor evolution for evolution's sake.

One day, hundreds of years ago, perhaps *N. lowii* grew singular,
a small pitcher plant sustained only by the death of others

until the mountain tree shrew came to eat—

what about the shrew—small, nameless—persuaded the plant to
avoid its own habits, to change for a creature once unknown?

Or perhaps the shrew was first. Perhaps her hunger cause
enough for her to drink the nectar she knew would be her last

only for the plant to allow her to remain.

I wonder—always—why, but know there is no answer for
created mutualism, for symbiosis once unnatural.

Santa Fe Poem

the windows were down the day
 you found me opened splayed
 like the figs on the glass plate in front of me
 ripening sweetening my bloodstream

and it was a humid June night when the lilies
 shadowed your jaw when I crawled into the forest
 of your ribcage when the ceroid cacti bloomed
 in a southern desert and our frozen waters
 cracked
 collided
 when I learned my hand feels foreign in my own hand

and still now sap drips down your face
 gnats stick to our sweaty cheeks braided
 in our hair during summer drought
 and then there is after:
 we cut a hole in the adobe roof
 our legs intertwined
 while the night sits
 green
 my belly burning red
 wet fruit dampening
 my palms

One Day

If, one day, later, I cannot remember anything from today,
please remind me of this: every day is just like another.
Tell me this is true, tell me how, despite, nothing is the same.

The birds, their chirping calls, sound over winds that shake
the house. We hear their wings flutter against each other.
If, one day, later, I cannot remember anything from today,
remind me how the smell of winter cedar drifts from the fireplace,
how, outside, it smells of the neighbors' laundry in the summers.
Tell me this is true, tell me how, despite, nothing is the same.

Today I saw a dog that looked just like mine, with the same
brown eyebrows turned toward each other, as if two lovers.
If, one day, later, I cannot remember anything from today,
remind me of the time she ran through the pasture last May,
rolled around in cow patties. How no one wanted to touch her.
Tell me this was once true, tell me how nothing is the same.

My grandmother forgets my name when she sees me. A shame
that one day, I may not remember your eyes. Their color.
If, one day, later, I cannot remember anything from this day,
tell me it is all still true. How, despite, nothing is the same.